

The California Master Plan for Education

California's Challenge

Public education is a vital interest of our state in that it provides Californians with the capacity, knowledge, and skills to sustain our system of government, to foster a thriving economy, and to provide the foundation for a harmonious society. As the global technological economy continues to evolve, Californians require additional, enriching educational opportunities throughout their lives. Today, students enter, exit, and re-enter the education system at various points in their lives, bringing increasingly diverse learning needs to each classroom. To be responsive to Californians' needs, our state must have a comprehensive, coherent, and flexible education system in which all sectors, from pre-kindergarten through postsecondary education, are aligned and coordinated into one integrated system.

In 1999, the California Legislature passed Senate Concurrent Resolution 29, calling for the creation of a new Master Plan for Education. With this charge, California began a new journey to a new destination in a new century – namely, to provide a coherent educational system that is attentive to learner needs, literally from birth through old age. This Master Plan for Education will serve as the roadmap for that journey, with two primary goals: to provide every family with the information, resources, services, involvement, and support it needs to give every child the best possible start in life and in school; and to provide every public school, college, and university with the resources and authority necessary to ensure that all students receive a rigorous, quality education that prepares them to become a self-initiating, self-sustaining learner for the rest of their lives.

A child entering preschool in 2002 can expect to graduate from high school in 2016 and, if he or she chooses, complete her or his bachelor's degree in 2020. It is beyond our ability to know with precision the learning needs of Californians in 2020. The primary need of every student is to become a capable learner who can readily learn whatever content becomes relevant to her or his life and work; therefore, we must craft an educational blueprint that addresses this need and helps frame the decisions we make now by anticipating the diverse learning needs of the future.

The sobering reality of California's education system is that too few schools can now provide the conditions in which the State can fairly ask students to learn to the highest standards, let alone prepare themselves to meet their future learning needs. This reality and several additional compelling issues lead us to construct a comprehensive Master Plan at this time:

- The students who have been served least well in our public schools, colleges, and universities – largely students from low-income families and students of color – also make up an ever greater proportion of California's increasing population; we must extend to them the same degree of educational promise that has been provided to the generations of California students that preceded them.

- As it was in 1959 when the Master Plan for Higher Education was first developed, California is challenged by estimates of a large increase in postsecondary education enrollment demand ('Tidal Wave II') over the next decade that can be accommodated only with careful systemic planning and sufficient investment.
- Also similar to the conditions of postsecondary education in 1959, today California's K-12 education system is governed by a fragmented set of entities with overlapping roles that sometimes operate in conflict with one another, to the detriment of the educational services offered to students. In addition, fragmentation and isolation prevent K-12 and postsecondary education institutions from effectively aligning and reducing the obstacles students face as they transition from one education sector to another.
- California's K-12 system operates without a clear vision or direction, with the result that it is susceptible to constant and major change by policy-makers that impedes schools' ability to plan for and deliver an education that meets the needs of students.
- California's educational institutions are often too rigidly structured to accommodate the increasingly diverse needs of the state's students.
- The continued economic viability of the entire state depends on a high quality educational system that uses effective strategies to help learners achieve their educational potential and objectives, that responds to high priority public needs, and that continuously engages in efforts to envision the future learning needs of Californians for successful transition to the rapidly evolving world of the modern economy. Providing all students the opportunity to achieve their highest academic and skill potential will enable them to pursue greater economic prosperity over a lifetime, better serving both them and society.

In addition to the foregoing structural issues, there is increasing concern over the disparity in quality of the education that our children are receiving. California no longer has any racial or ethnic group that is a majority of the state's population, yet schools serving large concentrations of low-income students, as well as those serving large numbers of Blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans, disproportionately receive fewer of the resources that matter in a quality education, resulting in lower student achievement. In urban and rural schools, which serve these students in higher concentrations, researchers estimate that as many as half of high school seniors leave school without the skills they need to succeed in further education or the world of work. The implications at the personal and societal level are enormous.

California's business community is increasingly concerned that California's low performance in state and national testing is occurring during a period in which students are required to have more substantial knowledge, and the ability to apply that knowledge, as well as more technical workplace skills in the post-industrial economy. One major newspaper recently stated, "the ranks of the working poor are also expanding and California is evolving, minute by minute, into a two-tiered society," a statement supported by the following facts:

- Barely half of California 4th and 8th graders (52 percent in both cases) demonstrated even basic competence in mathematics as measured by the 2000 administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), often cited as the nation's report card. Only 15 percent of 4th graders and 18 percent of 8th graders demonstrated proficiency in mathematics that year.

- NAEP scores from 1998, the most recent numbers available, reveal that 48 percent of 4th graders and 64 percent of 8th graders were basic readers, while fewer than one quarter of 4th and 8th graders were proficient or advanced readers.
- Fewer than half of California's 4th and 8th graders demonstrated a basic understanding of science on the 2000 administration of NAEP, ranking California last among the 40 states that participated. Only 14 percent of 4th graders and 15 percent of 8th graders demonstrated proficiency in science.
- Only 56.9 percent of Latino students who entered high school in 1996 graduated four years later. Black students had a similar graduation rate of only 57.8 percent. In contrast, Asian and White students graduated at rates of 86.3 percent and 77.6 percent, respectively.
- Despite the selective nature of admission to the California State University and the University of California, about half of all freshmen regularly admitted to CSU during the past decade have required remedial instruction in English or mathematics, or both, while approximately one-third of UC freshmen have required remedial instruction in English.
- Among the graduates of California's public high schools, White students are roughly twice as likely as their Black and Latino peers to attain CSU and UC eligibility, and Asian graduates are roughly twice as likely as their White counterparts to attain CSU and UC eligibility – a relationship that has existed since 1983.
- Data compiled by the California Council on Science and Technology (2001) indicate that women of all races, and African American and Latino men, represent underutilized pools of labor in the science and technology sector (which provides high-paying jobs). Differences in educational attainment and in choice of educational major contribute to these groups' underrepresentation in science and technology occupations and industries.
- The percentage of American households with at least one computer doubled from 1994 to 2000, rising from 24.1 percent to 51 percent. Computer ownership varies by racial, ethnic, and income groups, however, with 55.7 percent of White households and 65.6 percent of Asian households owning a computer in 2000, compared to 32.6 percent and 33.7 percent of Black and Latino households, respectively.
- The 2000 Employment Policy Forum report indicates that as many as 70 percent of students entering the workforce do not have sufficient skills to adapt to the simple writing needs of a business environment.
- The National Alliance of Business reports that a 1998 survey of 430 CEO's of product and service companies, identified in the media as the fastest growing sector of U.S. business over the last five years, found that 69 percent of them reported the shortage of skilled, trained workers as a barrier to growth, up 10 percent from the year before.

These data are indicative of the huge gap that exists between what many Californians need from their educational system and what they are actually receiving. To date, this gap has been only marginally affected by the many major reforms that have been imposed on our public schools, colleges, and universities since the mid-1980's. It provides stark evidence that a piecemeal approach to reforming education is ineffective. A comprehensive, long-term approach to refocusing education in California is clearly needed; and this approach must have a clear focus on improved student achievement. The Master Plan should be used by the Legislature as a template to ensure that proposed education legislation in coming years is consistently directed toward reaching the goals set forth in this Plan.

California's Vision

This California Master Plan for Education provides a long-term vision for an education system that is available to *every* Californian and that focuses on both learner needs and outcomes. This Plan is intended to serve as a framework to guide state and local policy-makers, as well as our educators, educational and community-based agencies, and business leaders, in making decisions that support this focus; to provide clear statements of expectations and goals; and to facilitate flexibility in responding to local needs and taking advantage of opportunities.

A Vision for California's Educational System

California will develop and maintain a coherent system of first-rate schools, colleges, and universities that prepares all students for learning and for transition to and success in a successive level of education, the workplace, and society at large, and that is fully responsive to the changing needs of our state and our people.

If this Master Plan's vision is to be met, our schools, colleges, and universities must make serving students' learning needs their primary focus, including at the most advanced levels of education. School districts, county and regional entities, community-based organizations, postsecondary institutions, business and industry, and the State must all collaborate with each other in building an aligned system of education that ensures the availability of the necessary resources to meet learner needs. All functions and policies of our education system must be regularly reviewed and revised to ensure that each supports this focus; in short, this vision requires a dynamic plan that is based on learner needs and that is comprehensive, grounded in data, and reviewed regularly for evidence of progress and need for revision.

Foundational Principle

The fundamental principle that serves as the foundation for this Master Plan is that an effective and accountable education system must focus first and foremost on the learner. Policies, practices, structures, and financing must all be re-evaluated and modified as needed to ensure they are supportive of learners and their acquisition of the knowledge and skills that will enable them to be successful learners and earners throughout their lifetimes.

Equal opportunity for all has been a broad goal of American public education for generations. Only in approximately the last 30 years, however, have the nation's educational and political establishments begun to develop a commitment to a two-pronged refinement of that goal, one unprecedented in any culture in history: First, the public schools will be ensured the capacity to provide the various kinds of instructional and other support necessary for *all* children to succeed, *including* children whose readiness to learn has received little or no attention prior to their

entering school, and those whose life circumstances continue to be less conducive to formal education than those of many others. Second, all children will not only begin school in an education system prepared to ‘take them as it finds them,’ but their persistence in that system will be developed, nurtured, and rewarded such that they will all ultimately graduate from high school with the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind requisite to self-initiated, life-long learning. This Master Plan is California’s first comprehensive template for the accomplishment of that radical goal.

It is important to emphasize that this California Master Plan for Education is focused on *all* students. Every school-age child is constitutionally guaranteed access to a free public education and is entitled to a high-quality educational experience without regard to his or her individual educational objectives. This guarantee applies to students attending rural, suburban, and urban schools; students from low, middle, and high-income families; students whose home language is not English as well as those who have spoken English their entire lives; high-achieving students and students who require supplemental education services to succeed in school; and students with visible disabilities as well as those with less obvious disabilities. The opportunity to participate in high-quality educational experiences is one to which older adult learners are entitled as well, should they choose to pursue adult or postsecondary education within the state. That these students are diverse and represent a kaleidoscope of cultures, abilities, and learning styles is a given in California and represents both great promise and great challenge in the forging of a coherent educational system that focuses on student achievement and responds to the myriad ways in which students choose to use their knowledge and skills.

Our committee’s focus on learners, and the foregoing goals for students, coincide with a newfound understanding of human brain development and learning. As the tenets of this Master Plan are implemented over time, every element of California’s education system can be informed by this knowledge to ensure that appropriate learning opportunities occur at developmentally optimal times for learners, resulting in gains in every student’s knowledge and cognitive development.

We have sought to identify ways in which our educational institutions can become more coherent or ‘seamless,’ providing learners with school and college experiences free of educational and bureaucratic impediments. We have sought to ensure equity within California’s education system, through recommendations to distribute the resources and opportunities necessary for a high-quality education to every student, irrespective of his or her circumstances. Even as we have examined what is required to provide a high-quality education, we have also sought to facilitate the critical evolution from access to success, by focusing on greater academic achievement and career preparation across the full spectrum of students at all levels. Finally, we have sought to create effective and comprehensive accountability for the entire education system by delineating authority and responsibility for all its participants in a manner that ensures each can be held accountable for ensuring all students learn.

It must be recognized that this 2002 Master Plan is being crafted at a time when California, like the rest of the nation, has entered into an economic downturn after nearly half a decade of unprecedented economic prosperity (which followed a deep recession that opened the last decade of the 20th century). This economic development is instructive in two very important ways: it

highlights the cyclical nature of California's 'boom and bust' economy, which has so dramatically shaped and reshaped educational opportunities; and it underscores the importance of Californians' taking a long-term approach to our collective investment in education. The committee realizes that an enormous increase in our investment in education will be required to fully implement the provisions of this Master Plan. Not all returns from this investment will be immediate; some will require years to be realized. This Master Plan, however, provides a guide to where new investments are most urgently needed to advance our vision for California education and, when it becomes necessary, where reduced investment might be directed to ensure least disruption to our collective commitment to promoting student achievement. It is envisioned that this Plan will guide our educational system for the next two decades; it should be used by the Legislature as a template to ensure that proposed education legislation in coming years is focused on reaching the goals contained in this Plan. Built-in flexibility will accommodate necessary changes during the life of the document.

Engaging the populace in planning for a more effective, learner-focused education system, especially for a system as large and complex as California's, requires creativity, a willingness to take risks, and a healthy amount of patience. Nonetheless, if our vision for California's educational enterprise is to be realized, it is imperative that all Californians become personally involved in the education and well-being of our learners – young and old alike. It is the challenge of this Master Plan for Education both to make that engagement happen and to guide it as it does. The Plan addresses this challenge by declaring the vision, principles, and goals of California's educational system; by clearly delineating the roles and responsibilities of all participants in the system; and by describing a system to ensure that those roles are effectively carried out to serve students.

We must engage *every child*, so he or she knows there is a place for him or her in our schools and in our society. We must engage communities both to foster a shared sense of purpose and to share responsibility for preparing and supporting every student. Ultimately, we must engage our entire state and its policymakers to make all Californians aware of the needs and purposes of our state's education system and the critical importance of planning for a future in which we raise the educational bar for all students while simultaneously opening the doors of academic and economic opportunity wider than ever before.

Organization of the Plan

The Joint Committee's vision is certainly ambitious. Ultimately, its implementation will require clear perspectives and input on the extent to which the vision remains in sight and within reach. This report seeks to provide those perspectives through its focus on four critical areas of California's educational system: access, achievement, accountability, and affordability. Each of the corresponding sections of this Plan provides a context for the interpretation of subsequent findings, describes today's realities and our vision of how California's education system could operate under the guidance of this Master Plan, and offers specific recommendations on what priorities should be pursued. Consistent with the goal of constructing a coherent education system, recommendations specific to preschool, K-12 education (including alternative education delivery structures), adult education, and postsecondary education are separately listed only

when necessary to address unique features of these portions of the education system. Similarly, this 2002 Master Plan seeks to delineate clearly the functions, responsibilities, and authority that should reside with state-level entities and those that should be delegated to regional and local entities. Finally, the Plan provides, in its appendices, data and references the reader can use to acquire a deeper understanding of California's education system and the research base that supports many of the recommendations contained in this Master Plan.

